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Tshombe held symbol of sellout

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Any African government claiming to be nationalist and revolutionary that found itself with former Congolese Premier Moise Tshombe on its hands would have a hard time justifying itself to the rest of Africa if it let Mr. Tshombe go scot-free.

Consequently, there will be little surprise at the decision of the Algerian Supreme Court July 21 that a request of the present Congolese Government be granted and Mr. Tshombe turned over to Congolese authorities.

Mr. Tshombe had been in detention in Algeria since the beginning of the month, when the chartered plane in which he was traveling between two islands in the Balearics was hijacked in midair and diverted to an Algerian airfield.

There is no evidence that the Algerian Government had any hand in getting Mr. Tshombe diverted or trapped on Algerian territory. But the Algerian Government is high on the list of those in Africa who look upon him as a traitor to the cause of African nationalism.

Indeed to much of Africa, Mr. Tshombe is a symbol and a scapegoat. In African eyes, he is a black man who never has hesitated to cooperate with those forces—often labeled with the derogatory description “neocolonialist”—which thwart the development, progress, and independence of African nationhood.

Murder charged

Rightly or wrongly, these are some of the charges brought against Mr. Tshombe by African nationalists:

- Responsibility for the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the Congo's first Premier, who—since his removal from the scene—has occupied a lofty place in the pantheon of African nationalist martyrs.

- Promoting in the early days of the Congo's independence the attempted breakaway of his own province of Katanga, thereby gravely wounding at the start Congolese unity, and threatening that balkanization which many Africans believe hampers healthy African national growth.

- Cooperation with governments in southern Africa which to black Africans are white-supremacist to facilitate that balkanization through Katanga's breakaway.

- Cooperation with European commercial interests—particularly the Belgian-controlled Union Minière du Haut-Katanga—to enable these interests to maintain their hold on Africa's natural resources.

- Unhesitating use of white mercenaries to further his ends—whether it be the breakaway of Katanga or his own return to power in the Congo.

Since October, 1965, Mr. Tshombe had been living in exile in Spain. In March of this year, the present Congolese Government—now headed by President Mobutu, commander of the Congolese National Army—had him tried in absentia on charges of treason.

He was found guilty and given a capital sentence. If the Algerian Supreme Court's decision of July 21 results in his being returned to the Congo, it remains to be seen whether he will be executed.

Unity pursued

In some ways, the decision may be a difficult one for President Mobutu—who nevertheless did not hesitate once before to have executed former Cabinet ministers whom he deemed a threat. But back in the early days of Congolese independence, there were moments when General Mobutu seemed much closer to Mr. Tshombe than to the late Patrice Lumumba—in whose delivery as a prisoner to Mr. Tshombe General Mobutu's Army apparently had a hand.

Yet ironically, now that General Mobutu is the strongman President of the Congo, he is invoking “Lumumbaism” in his efforts to build up a sense of Congolese unity—and indeed following many of Mr. Lumumba's policies in his attempts to strengthen the writ of the central government across the length and breadth of his vast country.

In the view of many, General Mobutu has been more successful so far than any other Congolese leader in trying to get the Congo on its feet from the shambles that followed the granting of independence seven years ago. This accounts for the quiet support he has gotten from the United States—of which the recent sending of three transport aircraft to help deal with the insurrection of mercenaries at Kisangani and Bukavu was the latest proof.

Suspicion traced

But so long as the resilient Mr. Tshombe